

# ***HOW TO OBTAIN A BUILDING PERMIT~Summary\**** **BUILDING PERMIT PROCEDURE MANUAL**

## **COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO**

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*The information contained in this Brochure is intended only as a guide. If you have any questions, please contact the Building Division of the Department of Planning and Land Use at one of the numbers listed above.*

***\*This is a summary document only.***

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# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE

This procedure manual is intended to help our customers obtain building permits. Sections describing the required steps in the building permit process and required clearances from other agencies are included to assist you in preparing your building plans and other required submittal documents. Our goal in preparing this manual is to make your visits to the Building Division of the Department of Planning and Land Use as efficient as possible.

## SUMMARY OF THE BUILDING PERMIT PROCESS

There are two basic phases to the building permit process, plan-check and construction inspection. During plan-check, county staff reviews the permit application and building plans for compliance with the building codes. Plan-check must be completed prior to the issuance of a building permit. Construction inspection takes place after a building permit has been issued. A Building Inspector approves each part of the project as it progresses, checking to see that the work is done safely and in accordance with the approved plans and codes. Explaining the plan-check process and assisting you in obtaining a building permit is the main focus of this manual.

Building permits can be processed either as a “regular permit” where the plans are submitted for review, or as a “minor permit” where the plans are reviewed at the building counter.

### REGULAR PERMITS

After building plans are submitted, the initial plan review takes approximately two weeks for residential projects. Subsequent reviews will take approximately one week. The purpose of subsequent reviews is to verify required corrections from earlier reviews have been made. Therefore, to avoid or reduce the number of subsequent plan-checks, please be certain to incorporate all of the corrections into the plans.

### MINOR PERMITS

Minor permits can be processed with an “over-the-counter” (OTC) plan-check. For OTC plan-checks, county staff will review the plans at the counter while you wait. If the plans are complete, a minor permit can be issued in a single visit. If, however, another agency outside the County is required to provide their approval, then a return trip to the building counter will be required after their approval is obtained.

Minor permits that are likely to receive an “over-the-counter” plan review are:

- Electrical, Plumbing, Mechanical Permits
- Patios; Decks; Swimming Pools; Spas
- Single Story Room Additions less than 500 sq. ft.;
- Patio Enclosures less than 500 sq. ft.
- Residential Garage Conversions less than 500 sq. ft.
- Carports; Retaining Walls; Re-roofs
- Residential Attached or Detached Garages less than 1,000 sq. ft.
- Agricultural Buildings less than 1,000 sq. ft.

## CODES AND ORDINANCES

The purpose of the County Building Codes is to provide minimum standards to safeguard life, health, property and the public welfare by regulating the design, construction; quality of materials and use of all buildings and structures in the unincorporated areas. For questions about a particular regulation, please refer to the applicable code or ordinance for more detailed and accurate information.

The County of San Diego currently enforces the 1997 edition of the Uniform Building Code, the 1997 editions of the Uniform Plumbing Code and Uniform Mechanical Code and the 1996 edition of the National Electric Code. In addition, the County also enforces the standards set forth in the California Building Code (Title 24 of the California Administrative Code), the San Diego County Zoning Ordinance, San Diego County Grading Ordinance, the County Code and various departmental policies.

## BASIC STEPS IN PERMIT PROCESS

The following steps must be completed before a permit can be issued. We have identified the party responsible for each step in ***bold italics***.

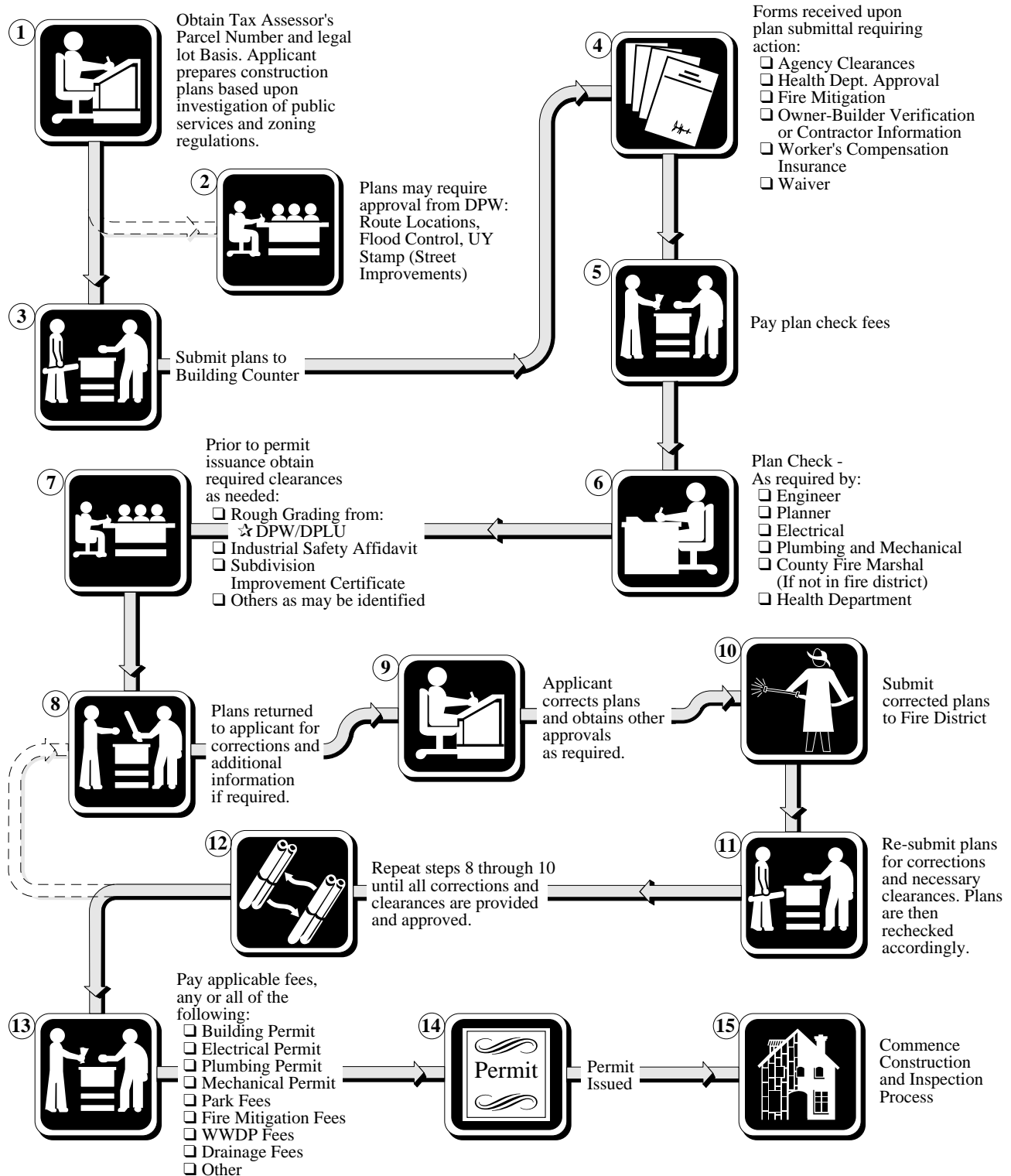
1. Obtain evidence of a legal lot. ***Customer*** (See page 6)
2. Determine zoning and setback requirements. ***Customer*** (See page 7)
3. Prepare building plans, structural calculations and energy calculations and obtain truss drawings (if applicable). ***Customer*** (See page 9)
4. Schedule an appointment for Single Family Dwellings, Tracts, or Commercial, or walk-in for over-the-counter permits. ***Customer*** (See page 8)
5. Commercial projects may require Centerline or Route Locations approval from the Department of Public Works (DPW) prior to plan submittal. ***Customer***
6. Complete application and submit plans to County. ***Both***
7. Receive list of administrative clearances that must be obtained before permit is issued and clearance letters for fire, school, water and sewer agencies. ***Both***
8. Submit grading plan if grading permit is needed. ***Both***
9. Pay plan review fees. ***Customer***
10. Post site cards and call for site inspection if grading permit is not required. ***Customer***
11. Obtain all required administrative clearances from step 7. (This can be done anytime between step 9 and step 21) ***Customer***
12. Plans are reviewed and correction list is prepared. ***County***
13. Customer notified by phone that plans have been reviewed. ***County***
14. Pick up plans and correction lists from County. ***Customer***
15. Correct all noted deficiencies on plans. ***Customer***

16. Reprint corrected plans. **Customer**
17. Return plans and correction lists to the County for recheck. **Customer**
18. Repeat steps 12 through 17 (as required) until all corrections are approved. **Customer**
19. Site inspection or rough grading inspection must be approved before a building permit is issued. **Customer**
20. Submit corrected plans to the Fire District. **Customer**
21. Return correction lists and corrected plans, stamped by the Fire District, to the County and submit evidence that all administrative clearances have been obtained. **Customer**
22. Permit invoice is issued. **County**
23. Pay permit fees, receive permit and approved plans. **Customer**

**See next page for a flow chart of the permitting process.**



## DPLU Building Permit Processing Flowchart



DPLU# 503 Bldg(6/00)

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### WHEN PERMITS ARE REQUIRED

A building permit is required to construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move, improve, remove, convert or demolish a building or structure.

Permits are also required for plumbing, electrical and mechanical work.

A permit must be obtained **prior** to construction.

Failure to obtain permits is a violation of County Ordinances.

### WHEN PERMITS ARE NOT REQUIRED

Permits are **NOT** required for the following:

1. Patio covers and carports, accessory to single-family dwellings or duplexes, up to 300 square feet of roof area and at least 3 feet from property line which comply with all requirements of the County Zoning Ordinance including setback from property line requirements.
2. Non-habitable recreation and athletic structures and equipment, excluding swimming pools, which comply with the requirements of the County Zoning Ordinance.
3. One-story detached accessory buildings including sea cargo containers used as non-habitable space such as tool or storage sheds, playhouses, agricultural buildings, and similar uses provided the roof area does not exceed 120 square feet and no plumbing, electrical, or mechanical permits are associated therewith. Such buildings must comply with the requirements of the County Zoning Ordinance.
4. Fences and free standing masonry walls not over 6 feet high which comply with the fencing and landscaping regulations of the County Zoning Ordinance. A building permit will also not be required for open fences up to 8 feet high, where allowed by the County Zoning Ordinance, provided the uppermost 2 feet consists only of barbed or razor wire and necessary support elements placed at an angle to the vertical for security purposes.
5. Oil derricks.
6. Moveable cases, counters and partitions not over 5 feet 9 inches high.
7. Retaining walls, not over 3 feet in height measured from the top of the footing to the top of the wall unless supporting a surcharge or impounding flammable liquids.

8. Water tanks supported directly upon grade if the capacity does not exceed 5,000 gallons and the ratio of height to diameter or width does not exceed two to one, or the capacity does not exceed 10,000 gallons and the ratio of height to diameter or width does not exceed one and one-half to one. Water tanks must comply with the requirements of the County Zoning Ordinance for Accessory Structures.
9. Platforms, walks and driveways not more than 30 inches above grade and not over any basement or story below.
10. Painting and papering and similar finish work.
11. Temporary motion picture, television and theater stage sets and scenery.
12. Window awnings supported by an exterior wall of single-family dwellings, duplexes, and accessory structures when projecting not more than 54 inches.
13. Prefabricated swimming pools accessory to single-family dwellings and duplexes in which the pool walls are entirely above the adjacent grade and if the capacity does not exceed 5,000 gallons.
14. Single pole television and radio antennas supported on roofs. Dish antennas supported on the ground when they comply with the accessory structure setback regulations of the County Zoning Ordinance.
15. Public utility towers and poles.
16. Any portable metal hanger less than 2,000 square feet in size, located on a County-owned airport used for the parking of aircraft only, and bearing evidence of approval by the Department of Motor Vehicles of the State of California for movement on any highway. Such structure shall, as an integral part of the basic construction, be equipped with a hitch or coupling device for towing. It shall accommodate, without further major structural change, wheel and axle assemblies, which will provide such structure with a safe means of portability. No water, sanitary facilities, or electrical installation shall be permitted in such structure and it shall be equipped with permanent ventilation as required for automobile repair garages.
17. Electroliner standards, flagpoles and antennas not over 35 feet in height above finished grade when fully extended which comply with the County Zoning Ordinance.



18. Agricultural shade structures where the shade is provided by a fabric or plastic film material, and agricultural crop protection structures which are constructed with a framework of metal or plastic hoops that are covered with a flexible plastic film, provided that all such structures comply with all requirements of the County Zoning Ordinance.

To obtain Zoning Regulations for the above items, call the Department of Planning and Land Use (DPLU), Zoning Counter at (858) 565-5981. Please have your Tax Assessor's Parcel Number available when you call.

## LEGAL LOT EVIDENCE

The Department of Planning and Land Use must verify that a parcel of land was legally created prior to issuing a building permit. However, it is the property owners' responsibility to provide evidence of a legal lot. One of the following will be acceptable as evidence of a legal parcel (See DPLU Policy G-3 for additional details):

1. A lot shown on a Final Map. (Major Subdivision Map)
2. A lot or parcel shown on a Record of Survey approved by the Board of Supervisors or the Planning Commission.
3. A parcel shown on a Parcel Map or Certificate of Compliance recorded in lieu of a Parcel Map.
4. A parcel described in a recorded Certificate of Compliance.
5. A parcel shown on an approved Division of Land Plat.
6. A parcel shown on a Lot Legalization Plat. (Used as evidence of legal parcel prior to Certificate of Compliance.)
7. A parcel shown on an approved Boundary Adjustment Plat.
8. A parcel described in a Grant Deed or other bonafide conveyance document recorded prior to **February 1, 1972**. The deed/document does not have to be in the name of the present owner. However, it must describe the perimeter boundaries of the subject property and no other contiguous property. **The legal description and County Recorder's information (date and recording number) must be legible to County staff.** The Deed need not be an original nor a certified copy.
9. A parcel that is completely surrounded by lots previously determined to have been legally created.

## ZONING REQUIREMENTS

### Setbacks

Setbacks are required distances from buildings to property lines. For individual lots, the San Diego County Zoning Ordinance contains minimum setback requirements. Structures generally can not be built within **SETBACKS**. Therefore, it is important to determine the setbacks prior to designing and locating a proposed structure on a lot. To obtain information on setbacks, contact the DPLU, Zoning Counter at (858) 565-5981 with the **TAX ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER** and one of the counter technicians will assist you.

In addition to zoning setbacks some County roads may have additional, more restrictive, setbacks due to future plans for expansion of road widths or realignment. If a property abuts one of these roads Department of Public Works approval is required prior to submitting the plans. See the item on Route Locations in the Detailed Requirements section of this book for the procedure.

### Easements

Inform the Counter Technician of any easements on, or abutting the property in question. To obtain easement information, refer to the legal lot basis or the property deed.

### Special Area Regulations

To determine if your property is subject to a Special Area Designation, please contact the Zoning Information Counter at (858) 565-5981. Examples of Special Area Designations include:

- Agricultural Preserve
- Community Design Review
- Fault Displacement
- Sensitive Resource
- Historic/Archaeological Landmark or District
- Specific Historic District
- Planned Development
- Coastal Resource Protection Area
- Scenic Preservation
- Unsewered Area
- Vernal Pool Area
- Flood Channel and Flood Plain

If the subject property is in a FLOOD PLAIN, Department of Public Works (DPW) approval is required before a building permit can be issued. The DPW phone number is (858) 694-3281.

Plans may be submitted prior to obtaining approval for any of the Special Area Regulations listed above. In that case however, a signed waiver of the right to refund plan-check fees will also be required. (A release from the above-mentioned agencies may be required as well before a building permit can be issued.)

## WHERE TO SUBMIT PLANS AND OBTAIN PERMITS

Building permits for any type of project may be obtained through our main office at 5201 Ruffin Road, Suite B, in San Diego (Kearny Mesa). In addition, minor permits (as defined on page 1) may be obtained at our two field offices located at 338 Via Vera Cruz, Suite 201, in San Marcos and 200 E. Main St., 6th Floor, in El Cajon. If the building design requires engineering, then the plans must be submitted at the Ruffin Road office. All offices are open weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and the Ruffin Road office is open until 7 p.m. on Thursday evenings.

## APPOINTMENTS

**An appointment is required to submit plans for all projects except minor “over the counter” permits.** Appointments can be made by calling (858) 565-5920. When requesting an appointment, you will need to provide the assessors parcel number of the lot, a description of the proposed project and a contact name and phone number. Allow yourself at least **one hour** to submit plans for plan-check or to obtain a building permit.

## TIME SCHEDULES AND DEADLINES

### Plan-Check

A plan-check is valid for one calendar year from the date the plan-check fee is paid. Typically, residential plan-checks take a minimum of two weeks to complete. Grading plan-check takes a minimum of three working days. These time estimates may vary depending upon the workload, however our median goal is ten working days for residential plan-check. The grading plan-check fee is good for as long as the building plan-check is valid, or one calendar year. If the plan-check expires, the plans must be resubmitted and a new plan-check fee paid.

### Building Permit

Once a building permit has been obtained, an inspection must be requested every six months and construction progress is required to keep a building permit active. A permit has a maximum duration of three years. An expired building permit may be renewed for a percentage of the current fees; however, the plans may be subject to any new regulations that are in effect at the time of the renewal.

## **PLAN SUBMISSION (DPL: BLDG 291 IS NOT AVAILABLE VIA THE WEBSITE)**

### Permit Application

When submitting plans, you will need to complete a Building Permit Application. Fill out the portion that is labeled "Applicant to Complete" on form DPLU: BLDG-291. (The area to the left of the heavy black line.) If the owner will construct the project, please write owner/builder on the line requesting a contractor's name. Please read the owner/builder verification form (DPLU #421), if you plan to complete the permit application without a licensed contractor. If a site address has not been assigned, leave the space blank and one will be assigned at submittal. Please check off one of the declaration of Worker's Compensation statements and if required, bring in a copy of the Worker's Compensation Policy. To obtain information regarding contractor's license, call the State of California Contractor's License Board at (800) 321-2752 or visit their web site at <http://www.cslb.ca.gov>.

### Building Plans

To apply for a building permit, submit at least two (2) complete non-erasable sets of building plans. See the form titled Minimum Essential Items for Submitting Plans for Single-Family Dwellings and Accessory Structures (DPLU #658) for examples of detailed plan requirements. Also see form DPLU #90 for the plot plan requirements. The plot plan should show at least two (2) off-street parking spaces, which must be located behind the front yard setback. The parking spaces do not have to be covered.

Most homes and residential accessory structures may be designed and drawn by non-professionals. All commercial structures and more complicated homes are required to be designed by a Registered Engineer or Architect who must sign each drawing with his/her stamp and license number. Structural calculations must be stamped and signed by a California Registered Civil Engineer or Architect, including his/her registration or license number.

All building plans must comply with the minimum construction specifications found on form DPLU #81. A copy of Form DPLU #81 should be attached to each set of building plans.

The building plans must also include two (2) sets of truss details when a trussed roof will be used and two (2) sets of energy calculations, if the building is mechanically heated or cooled.

## Electrical Information

If an electrical service of more than 200 AMPS is requested, or the proposed building is a commercial building, your architect or contractor must also submit single line drawings and load calculations.

## **PERMIT ISSUANCE**

When your plans are approved and a building permit is issued, you will receive a stamped copy of the building plans, a copy of the building permit and an inspection record card. These must be kept on the building site and the inspector must have access to these while the structure is under construction.

## **INSPECTIONS**

To request an inspection call any of our offices during normal business hours or use the 24-hour inspection request hotline (800) 351-2551. When calling for an inspection, refer to the COMPUTER GENERATED PERMIT NUMBER and the job site address of your lot. In most areas of the county the DPLU, Building Division requires one working day notice for inspections. We may not be able to provide next day inspections in some of the more remote areas of the county. Please verify with the person taking the inspection request what day the inspector will be out to the site.

## **PLAN CHANGES**

Buildings must be constructed as shown on the plans approved by the DPLU, Building Division. If any changes in the actual project construction are proposed, those changes will need to be reviewed and approved before commencing work. Potentially costly errors can be avoided if Building Division staff reviews all plan changes **before** construction occurs.

If the proposed changes are minor and can be drawn on the plans in five minutes or less, new drawings will not be required. The applicant may revise the job set of approved plans and transfer those revisions to the file set of plans at the counter in the appropriate field office. All changes must be made in non-erasable form and will be reviewed by County staff for approval. If plan changes are submitted to and approved by the Kearny Mesa office, County staff will make copies of the changes for transmittal to the appropriate field office. In either case the plan changes on the applicant's approved set of plans need to be initialed and stamped by County staff to indicate that the changes have been approved.

More extensive plan changes will require additional sheets to supplement or replace the sheets and/or details in the original approved plans. If an architect or engineer prepared the original submittal, the same design professional must sign and stamp the revised plans. Some changes of this sort can be reviewed at the San Marcos and El Cajon field offices; however, if the plan-check time will exceed 20 minutes or complex engineering is involved, the plan changes must be reviewed at the Ruffin Road office. The more clearly the changes are drawn the more likely the review will occur in the field offices.

Proposed plan changes that would alter the exterior of the structure may also require review and approval by a planner at the Zoning Counter.

**When submitting changes to the County offices for review please bring the following:**

- The approved copy of the construction plans. The approved copy is the one with the perforated date stamps from the County on each sheet of the plans.
- Minor changes may be made in ink directly on the approved set of plans. More extensive plan changes must have additional sheets to supplement or replace the sheets in the original submittal.
- Details or portions of the original plans replaced by the revisions must be removed or clearly deleted. If sheets are removed be sure to bring in the old sheets so that County staff can determine the extent of the changes.
- If an architect or engineer prepared the original submittal, the same professional must sign and stamp the revised plans.
- Two sets of revised sheets or plan sets will be required to complete the process.
- If any replacement calculations or truss drawings are required, both the old and new sets should be provided for plan-check.

If the permit has not been issued; modify the permit application to reflect any changes in description of work or floor area. If the permit has been issued and there is a change in scope of work requiring an additional permit, a new application for the additional work will be required.

Plan change fees will be assessed at the time and material rate for engineering staff. Currently the rate is \$84.92 per hour and there is a one-half hour minimum charge.

If the scope of the permit changes or if additional floor area is added, additional plan-check and permit fees, school fees, and/or fire mitigation fees may be due. At that point, any adjustments to your plan records will also be made, necessary clearances will be set, and you will receive instructions on how to proceed. When plan change approvals are complete, you will receive an invoice to pay any required fees and to obtain final validation of the changes to your plans.

## **FEES**

There are two basic components to fees charged by the DPLU Building Division, plan-check fees and permit fees. Most projects will be charged both fees. The amount of each of these fees is determined based on the actual cost of providing plan-check and inspection services. To determine the exact fees for a particular project see the Permit Fee handout (form DPLU # 613).